

BCE Media Release – Everybody belongs – diverse BCE schools celebrate their differences while supporting their multicultural communities

Brisbane Catholic Education schools reflect the nation’s cultural and ethnic diversity, with its’ 77,000 plus students born in more than 145 countries and speaking 155 different languages.

During Harmony Week 2023, five Brisbane Catholic Education schools with some of the most diverse student populations are celebrating their diverse school communities.

The most diverse of all BCE schools across South East Queensland when it comes to languages spoken is Clairvaux MacKillop College Upper Mt Gravatt, whose students speak “no less than 54 different languages,” says Principal Wayne Chapman.

“Diversity is a great strength, and each culture creates a richer, more improved and increasingly mature society,” he says.

Among the benefits, the Principal cites is linguistic diversity in schools, which he says creates “opportunities for cultural exchange, language learning, and community building.”

“Our students can gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of other cultures, which helps to foster a more inclusive and tolerant environment,” he says.

Primary students from more than 32 nationalities attend Saint Francis Xavier School Goodna, led by Juru Nation woman and Principal Kellie Jacobsen.

“Culturally diverse schools lead to richer and more inclusive educational experiences for students,” says the Principal, whose school has a large population of students from Samoa, Tonga and the Pacific Islands, as well students from African countries and cultures.

“With the world becoming increasingly interconnected, it’s important students develop cultural competence and an ability to work with people from diverse backgrounds.”

Our Lady’s College Annerley Principal Andree Rice says her students come from 28 different cultural groups, with the second most widely spoken language in the school being Vietnamese, followed by Dinka.

“Diverse schools are an authentic representation of Australian society, and it is vitally important that all students develop intercultural, interpersonal, and ethical skills – these are the skills that build better citizenship and a more inclusive and just country,” she says.

The Principal says several programs enhance the school’s offering, both educating on cultural differences and encouraging and providing opportunities for students to connect with their culture and language.

"The Cultural Collective is a student group who have joined a program run by Multicultural Development Australia to help schools equip young people with the skills to identify racism and discrimination in their communities and to educate their peers about these issues.

"We also work closely with the local African Youth Council, whose cultural program at Our Lady's College enables students to learn instruments, art, and cooking from their own culture."

St Francis College Crestmead Principal John Marinucci says his college "has 50 different cultural groups from 20 faiths" and programs and initiatives promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion.

"We host cultural days, language courses, and cultural sensitivity training for staff and students and our teachers take part in courses that focus on differentiated learning and teaching and trauma informed education each year," he says.

"Our Community Hub hosts a Breakfast Club from Monday to Friday, craft sessions and we also have a Community Hub Leader who assists our parent community with resumes, job applications, and other paperwork they may need help with."

St Brendan's Primary School Moorooka Principal Cathryn Caldwell says her students come from a variety of cultural backgrounds.

"At our school we are blessed to have students from Ethiopia, Kenya, Colombia, Philippines, Nepal, Thailand, Germany, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and Afghanistan to name a few," she says.

"Of our 99 students, 35 speak a language other than English at home. And out of those 35 students, they speak 25 different languages.

"To stay connected with our community we created a Community Hub which supports our parents to learn English and make connections within our school community. We also offer our Mums yoga and craft classes.

"For our students who are new to speaking English, we have a designated English as an additional language or dialect (EALD) teacher, who provides targeted English language instruction to help students develop their literacy and English language skills."

BCE Education Officer English as an Additional Language/ Dialect (EAL/D) Bernadette Barker says, "BCE has approximately 5,500 students in our system who require support with learning English."

"EALD teachers support students and classroom teachers whose students are in the process of learning English," she says.

"They build on the language and cultural diversity of these students to provide the right environment for learning. Harmony Week is an opportunity to build on the resources that students and families bring from a language and cultural background other than English, and students feel proud of their cultural and linguistic heritage showcased during this week in concerts, school assemblies and community celebrations."

BCE's Head of Education Marisa Dann says, "we believe that this diversity enriches the educational experience for our students, fosters a greater understanding and respect for different perspectives and ways of life, and prepares our students to be global citizens who thrive in an increasingly interconnected world."

"In line with our Catholic social teachings, BCE is committed to supporting all students and families so that they feel welcomed, respected, included, and safe within our school communities," she says.

Media contact: Caroline Kovac 0420 402 241